How fast do food poisoning symptoms show up?  [1]

Alice...

How long after eating possibly contaminated food would one suffer the symptoms of food poisoning? And please advise if severe cramping, watery diarrhea, and vomiting are such symptoms.

?Ill

Answer

Dear Ill,

Feeling queasy after eating that meal? Feel like you can't get to the restroom fast enough? Check, please! Food poisoning occurs after consuming food or beverages in which certain bacteria, viruses, or parasites are living. Anywhere from a few hours to a few days after consuming contaminated food is the typical timeframe for experiencing symptoms of food poisoning. Although these symptoms may vary and may be mistaken with symptoms of other illnesses, the cramping, watery diarrhea, and vomiting may be part of the ordeal of food poisoning.

More than 250 different types of food poisoning are known, though the most common types of poisoning are due to E.coli, Salmonella, Campylobacter, and the Norwalk-like viruses. While their origins and transmission characteristics may vary, these organisms all enter the body through the gastro-intestinal tract and may cause symptoms such as diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, and cramps. Keep in mind that these symptoms may also be a sign of certain food allergies or other illnesses. Certainly, if you experience these symptoms every time you eat a certain food, you may want to ask a health care provider whether you may be allergic to that food.

While food poisoning symptoms usually go away in one to two days, symptoms may last for up to ten days. Immediately contact a health care provider if you experience high fever (a temperature of 101.5F or more), bloody stools, dehydration, and diarrhea lasting more than three days. To relieve the uncomfortable symptoms of food poisoning and prevent dehydration:

- Give your stomach a break by not consuming food or drink for a few hours;
- When you start eating again, eat bland foods and avoid dairy, caffeine, alcohol, nicotine, and spicy foods;
- Sip small amounts of liquids like water, clear broth, or clear soda;
- Rest up;
- Avoid taking anti-diarrheal medications. Why, you may ask? Diarrhea is one way your body helps get rid of the nasty organisms that found their way into your food and stomach. The sooner those critters are out of your body, the sooner you'll start to feel better.

*List adapted from* [Food Poisoning-Lifestyle and Homes Remedies](#2) *from the Mayo Clinic.*

To protect yourself from food borne illnesses, you may want to try some of the following tips:

- Cook eggs, meat (to 160F), and poultry thoroughly;
- Avoid cross-contamination by keeping raw eggs, meats, and poultry away from other foods and containers;
- Let the leftovers chill out by refrigerating any uneaten foods immediately;
- Wash fruits and vegetables well, being sure to wash off the dirt;
- Be a picky restaurant-goer and avoid restaurants with poor inspection grades.

*List adapted from* [Protecting Yourself from Foodborne Illness](#3) *from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.*

Here's to enjoying your food and not feeling sorry about it later!

Alice!

Category:
- General Health
- Stomach & Other Gastrointestinal Grumblings

**Related questions**

- What medicine is there to treat food poisoning? [6]
- Recurring flu symptoms, or something else? [7]
- Waiter, there's blood in my soup? Does the chef have any diseases? [8]
- What's that growing in the refrigerator?!? A guide for storing and eating leftovers [9]
- Sold on sell-by dates? [10]
- Why do I gag when someone is vomiting? [11]

**Resources**

- [Medical Services (Morningside)](#12)
- [Medical Services (CUMC)](#13)

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